

Keep watch for these three new labels on packaged foods

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Food shopping can be a daunting experience. With roughly 20,000 new products introduced each year, decoding the nutrition facts and label claims on even a small fraction of them could keep you in the grocery aisle all day.

The reality is that no matter how deeply we care about the healthfulness of the foods we buy and how they are produced, analyzing each option is just not feasible in a world where most of us are living a perpetual game of beat-the-clock. That's where front-of-the-package emblems come in — nongovernment, third-party-authorized stamps that tell us at a glance that a product meets a specific set of standards.

[Not all processed foods are bad for you. How they're made matters.]

These logos, such as the American Heart Association's Heart-Check mark on packaged foods and the Certified Humane seal on eggs, meat and dairy, are designed not only to help consumers navigate the store more easily but also to incentivize companies to produce goods that meet the desired criteria. Keep your eyes peeled, because three new food emblems have launched recently that could not only help you make better choices and get out of the store faster but also help improve the foods that make it to grocery shelves.

(Good Housekeeping Institute)

Good Housekeeping 'Nutritionist Approved'

Wish you had a trusted nutritionist beside you as you shop, guiding you to the best choices? That's the idea behind the Good Housekeeping "Nutritionist Approved" emblem.



Products with the logo have been given the thumbs up by the registered dietitian who developed the program, Jaclyn London, nutrition director of the Good Housekeeping Institute. She evaluates the products that apply for the seal to ensure they are in line with the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans. The products also must meet the program's core values of simplicity (makes it easier for consumers to keep a healthy habit, and/or has simpler ingredients and fewer additives than comparable products), transparency (has accurate product claims that do not mislead consumers) and innovation (uses current technologies to make healthier habits easier for consumers and/or improves sustainability).

A product doesn't have to be 100 percent healthy to get the stamp — it just has to be a smart choice in a given category. So while you might see the emblem on a packaged salad or nutritious frozen meal, you might also find it on a better-for-you frozen dessert or mini dark-chocolate candy, for example.

Besides alerting consumers to healthier options, the "Nutritionist Approved" program also works with companies to help them develop and market better products. "We want brands to be incentivized to make healthier changes for the long term," says London.

As with any third-party emblem, companies pay a licensing fee for the seal, and in this case that includes consulting services.

The "Nutritionist Approved" emblem launched in October with nine brands, and London says it is expanding quickly. The long-term vision is to extend it beyond the grocery store to other arenas such as restaurants, movie theaters and airports.

(Oldways)



50%+ Whole Grain

The Dietary Guidelines recommend making half your grains whole, and Caroline Sluyter, the Whole Grain Stamp program manager at Oldways, a nonprofit nutrition education organization, found that her team was fielding a lot of questions from consumers asking how they could tell if they were actually hitting that 50 percent mark. Many products have a mix of whole and refined grains, and the regular packaging information does not reveal the proportions.

To address this need, Oldways just launched the “50%+ Whole Grain” stamp to complement two stamps they have had in place since 2005: “100% Whole Grain” and what they call their basic “Whole Grain” stamp for foods made with some whole grain, specifically 8 grams or more per serving.

Sluyter said that thousands of products have been approved for the “50%+” stamp and that some will hit the shelves this spring. Besides making it easier for shoppers to identify foods that meet the Dietary Guidelines, this new stamp “gives manufacturers another benchmark to strive for and could reward them for increasing the amount of whole grain in their products,” she said.

Certified Transitional



While Kashi is the only brand with the seal, it is available to any company and is managed by Quality Assurance International, an independent third-party certifying agency. Certified transitional products provide financial support for farmers going organic by paying them a premium price for their crops during the transition period. According to Nestojko, "We really want it to be more than a label — we want it to be a movement that helps change the food system."